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# A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ETON COLLEGE CHAPEL,

ON

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BY THE

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## TRINITY SUNDAY.

ISAIAH vi. 1.—“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.”—(From the first lesson for the day).

THE year of King Uzziah's death was, for one man at least, something more than a mere date. It was the occasion, and, as it would seem also, the cause that led to the conversion of Israel's greatest prophet. Isaiah had grown up under the shadow of Uzziah's greatness and prosperity; had seen his kingdom in its glory; had perhaps known the king personally, of whom it was written that “God helped him and made him to prosper, and his name spread far abroad, and he was marvellously helped till he was strong.” And then suddenly, at the very zenith of his fame, there came the news that all the glory was eclipsed; the king was a leper, in a lazarus, cut off from the temple, where he had presumptuously attempted to burn incense: henceforth Jerusalem should see him no more, or if she saw him it would be to hear the leper's cry from his lips, “Unclean, unclean.”

That was the crisis, the turning-point of the young prophet's life. Was not the hand of God in all this? So his vision came to him. High above the earthly monarch, above the temple which that monarch had tried to desecrate, Isaiah saw the Lord—sitting upon His throne, high and lifted up, with the heavenly choirs around him, veiling their faces and feet



before Him as they uttered exultingly the hymn, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts."

And at the sight of such majestic holiness the scales fell from the prophet's eyes, and another revelation was manifested to him: he saw for the first time himself; himself in his true light, as he must appear to God—in his foulness and unworthiness—himself like the king unclean, unclean. "Woe is me," he cried, "for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Like St. Peter he would have shunned the sight and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But no, it was the vision saved him: for in virtue of his confession the live coal from off the altar could be laid upon his lips, his iniquity taken away, and his sin purged.

And after that he was ready for God's work. The voice of the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah could answer, "Here am I; send me." No compulsion, no social pressure lay upon him; but he had seen the divine vision, had heard the divine call: and immediately he was full of the mind that he was the man wanted—he must go. "The Lord God had spoken; who could but prophesy?" That moment saved him—from a man of unclean lips he was converted into a prophet of God.

Such is the story of this morning's lesson. You will easily distinguish the stages: a great shock; a great vision; a great awakening; and a great conversion. Years after the prophet could look back upon it as the historic landmark of his life. Then and there—so he could reflect—did I see the Lord—then and there did I receive my call.

Are not these things written for our learning?

For we meet to-day under the shadow of a calamity that



has sent a shock not only through our Eton world, but throughout the length and breadth of the land.

There is scarcely a home in England—there is certainly not a school—where hearts are not awed and sorrowful at the thought of the tragedy which took place last Monday within a few yards of this Chapel. A great wave of sympathy and compassion has flowed out towards you here.

It is an experience which none of you can ever forget. Years hence, when you are old men, you may look back upon this week and say: Then and there came to us the shock of our lives—then and there we saw the writing of God's hand upon the wall. God grant you may be able to add: Then and there came also to me my awakening and my call.

My dear Eton friends, it is not easy, coming suddenly among you from outside, to voice the feelings of your hearts; not easy to speak calmly, when the connexion is so close, some of my old pupils only just rescued from the devouring flames, and one of the victims, a friend's son—who might, under other circumstances, have been in my own house now. You will understand, and if the words halt forgive.

What is to be the meaning of it all for you? What permanent impression is it to leave behind, beyond the momentary impression which even the least thoughtful must recognise? These great calamities have the power of awakening the very best that is in us—for awhile; you must have felt that. The courageous steadiness, the heroic struggle to save, these were there; it is pleasant to think that all that could be done was done, that there was no panic, but collectedness and presence of mind, with the one resolute desire to help. Then too the after-kindness of innumerable friends, the memorial services so simple and impressive, that wreath “with the deep sympathy of Harrow School,” these things will hardly be

forgotten. And have we not all known, in a new measure, what it is to bear one another's burdens and share one another's sorrows? to comfort the bereaved and to pray for light for them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death? Surely too we have learned to attach a new reality to those common supplications and prayers in which we make it part of our petitions to God that we may be delivered from sudden death, or daily thank Him that He has brought us safely to the beginning of another day. And surely we must have felt, verified in the lessons of our own experience, the truth of last Monday's own Psalm, "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest; for it is Thou Lord only that makest me dwell in safety."

But can we also see, as Isaiah would have seen, the hand of God in all this? the vision of the Lord upon His throne, high and lifted up? Does it not seem to you as if the call of God which summoned two of your number away, which might have summoned you, was meant not for them alone, but for us all? They have gone into the vision of the presence of God. The veil that hides Him from our eyes has for them been torn aside. Are we not meant to go into His presence too—to see at least the train of His Majesty filling our temple now? the Lord sitting upon His throne—so loving yet so stern—so unapproachable in His infinite holiness—in order that we, so hardly escaped from peril, may know our own sinfulness, and feel ourselves unclean, unclean? Must we not turn the searchlight of our gaze in upon our own consciences, and cry: "Woe is me; for I am undone; for I am a man, a boy, of unclean lips"? If so, my friends, do not suppose that all is over now. God has shown you how in the midst of life we are in death. Shall it be true of us, as of the Israelites, "that when He slew them they sought Him,

and turned them early, and enquired after God"? Only when He slew them—is it only then that we can see the majestic beauty of His holiness and the contrasted hideousness of sin? Shall we be content with that? Well at least let us see one instant and be saved. "Lord, I pray Thee, open our eyes, that we may see." We know God's purpose is for us—who knows but what this dread experience near the valley of the shadow of death may be God's own way of awakening us; and the blazing fire just the seraph's coal with which He means to touch our lips—so that our iniquity may be taken away, and our sin purged for ever?

It may be so—and if so there follows out of it a call to a new and higher life as its fruit: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" The sorrows of the world have come very nigh us: those two lives that were lost have focussed them upon ourselves. Any one of you would have done anything, would have risked his own life, to save the lives of those two whom you failed to save. But what I want to ask is this. Which of you would have had the courage to do anything to save their souls? The Bible uses the same word for life and soul—they are the same in God's sight. Suppose you had been summoned to save them from moral injury—from the sin that kills the soul—from those sins of which one can only pray "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"—how would it have been then? Would you have given your help? I know what the answer would be to-day; for the moral cowardice or moral callousness that says with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" that, one may hope, is gone for awhile. Yet not long since I remember talking with an Eton boy who had just left school—he too has now been summoned to his rest—and I shall never forget the smiling certainty with which he laid it down that at Eton

such moral interferences would never be tolerated; it would never be otherwise, could never be. Is it indeed true? Can no one arise and say, "Here am I, send me," to the Lord's call "Who will go for us?" You think it is impossible for you to do anything. Yet have I seen, and I had meant to tell you this, quite apart from the circumstances that have changed the whole colour of our thoughts to-day—I have seen the whole tone, first of a house and then of a school, raised and purified by the courage and highmindedness of a single boy. He was not in any Eleven or Eight—he was not what I suppose you would call pious. But two things he had, besides a certain natural tact and commonsense, and they were these: a single-hearted virtuousness in his own life, and a set determination that where he was these things should not be. There is nothing sensational in the story, except it be the great wave of popularity on the crest of which that boy left. Nothing sensational; yet truly do I account such a record one of the really great and momentous events in the life of a school. Nor can I doubt that it might be so here, and that this great sorrow, if it could awaken but one Isaiah among us to see things in their true light, and in the splendour of that vision to have the courage to work alone, might become indeed the fair beginning of a time. At least "the lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

And one thing I may venture to assert. These two children whose time on earth has been thus cut short—both of them as yet inconspicuous, over whom but for their sudden death your annals might have been silent—what is it in regard to them that makes us resigned, almost happy, now? This, and this only. They were both by universal consent good boys—keen, intelligent, joyous, simple-hearted. Merci-

fully we know that. That fresh young keenness in things intellectual, that Bible at the bedside speaking of another keenness by which the first was sanctified—these things are not forgotten. We feel our own loss the more, but we have no fears for them. It puts no strain upon our faith to believe that they passed from us free from guile—that they have passed simply into the nearer presence of God. We knew them righteous, and “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery; but—they are in peace.” That is the solace; they are in peace. And we hope and think that, like Jesus sleeping amid the press of the waves and the storm, so they sleeping in the midst of the raging flames entered into their peace peacefully.

Then may we lift up our eyes once more; look up and see the Lord sitting upon His throne, high and lifted up—in His sternness and in His love—and with that vision before us dedicate our lives anew, and offer ourselves to His call—“Here am I, send me,” not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but rather “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Unworthy in our weakness  
 On Him our hope is stayed,  
 And blest by His forgiveness  
 We will not be afraid.

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